DOCUMENT RESUME

ED 464 803 RC 023 549

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TITLE	Daughters of the Earth: Skills-Based Literacy Programme for Women, China. Education for All: Making It Work. Innovation Series.
INSTITUTION	United Nations Educational, Scientific, and Cultural Organization, Paris (France). Education for All Forum Secretariat.; United Nations Children's Fund, New York, NY.
REPORT NO	No-8
ISSN	ISSN-1020-0800
PUB DATE	1995-00-00
NOTE	37p.; Photographs may not reproduce adequately. Available in English and French. For number 7, see RC 023 548.
AVAILABLE FROM	Documentation and Information Center, Education Sector, UNESCO, 7 place de Fontenoy, 75352 Paris 07 SP, France (Reference no. 283.105). Tel: 33-1-45-68-10-29; Fax: 33-1-45-68-56-24; e-mail: cdi-ed@unesco.org; Web site: http://www.unesco.org/education/catalogues/.
PUB TYPE	Collected Works - Serials (022) -- Reports - Descriptive (141)
EDRS PRICE	MF01/PC02 Plus Postage.
DESCRIPTORS	Adult Basic Education; *Agricultural Education; Economic Development; Empowerment; Foreign Countries; *Literacy Education; Material Development; *Relevance (Education); *Rural Education; Rural Women; Self Esteem; Sex Role; *Social Change; Vocational Education; *Womens Education
IDENTIFIERS	*China

ABSTRACT

Begun in the early 1990s, The Skills-Based Literacy Programme for Women aims to improve the lives of rural Chinese women by linking literacy education with skills training in agriculture and other forms of income generation. Xuan Wei County, Yunnan Province, was chosen as the seat of the project because of high female illiteracy rates and the need for improved agricultural skills to cope with the area's rugged terrain. Before the program, women accustomed to low status and endless labor did not see literacy as relevant to their lives, and men objected to their wives and daughters taking time from their work to attend classes. Project organizers and the All China Women's Federation carried out publicity campaigns to gain community support for women's education. Relevant instructional materials were produced within the regional context to show how women's economic self-reliance, self-confidence, self-respect, self-improvement, and status within society would be enhanced under four conditions: realistic portrayal of women's actual condition and double responsibilities as housekeepers and economic producers; provision of locally relevant knowledge skills to improve women's economic productivity; realization that this improved productivity would affect the balance of power between men and women, making it more equitable; and the lessening of women's domestic workload. Project evaluations and outcomes are discussed. A final section describes the program's philosophy of empowerment, the All China Women's Federation, and the "Sisters of a Thousand Yuan" award for successful women. (Contains photographs.) (SV)

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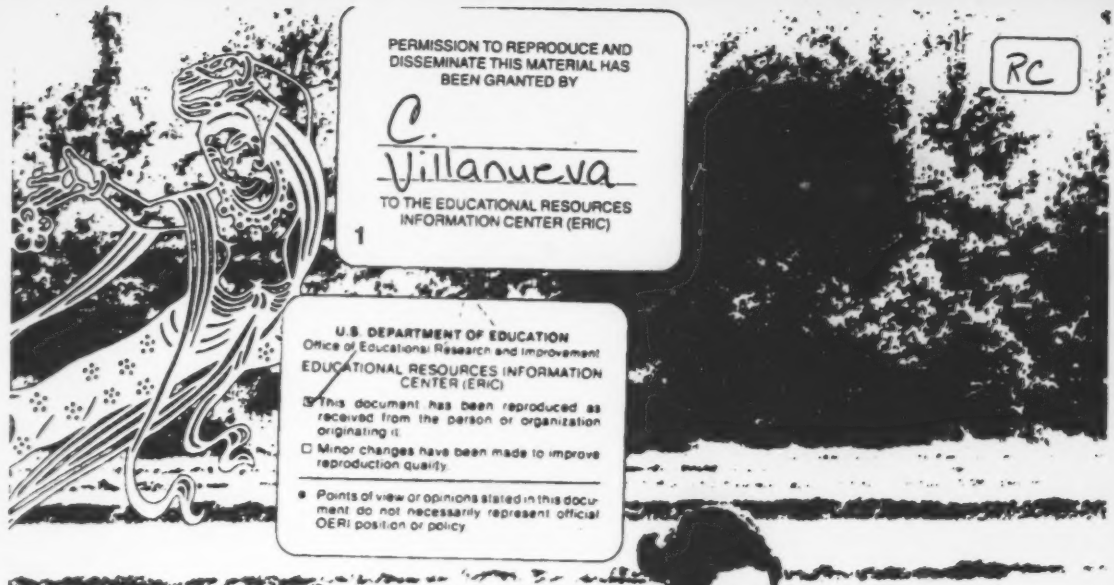

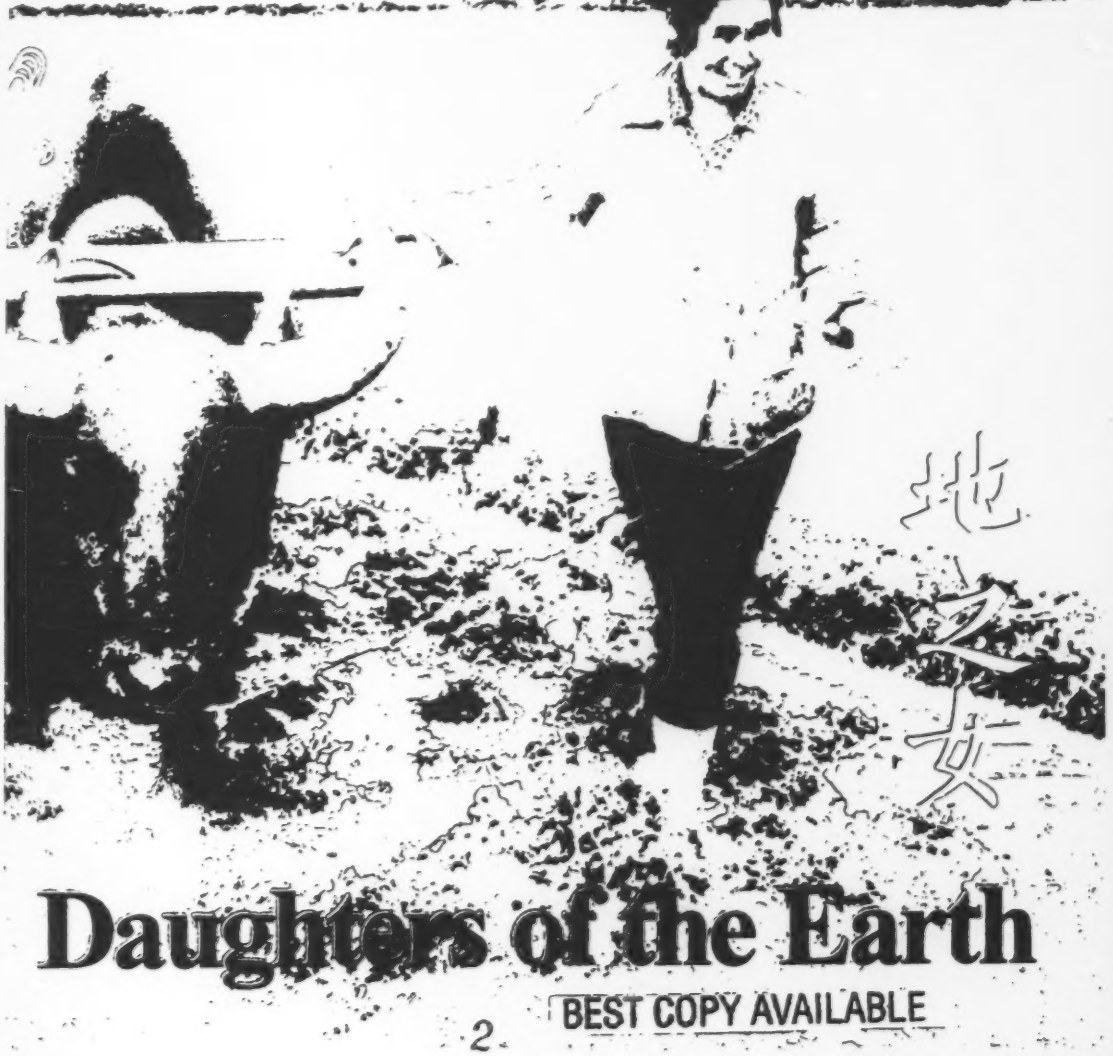

Skills-based Literacy Programme for Women, China

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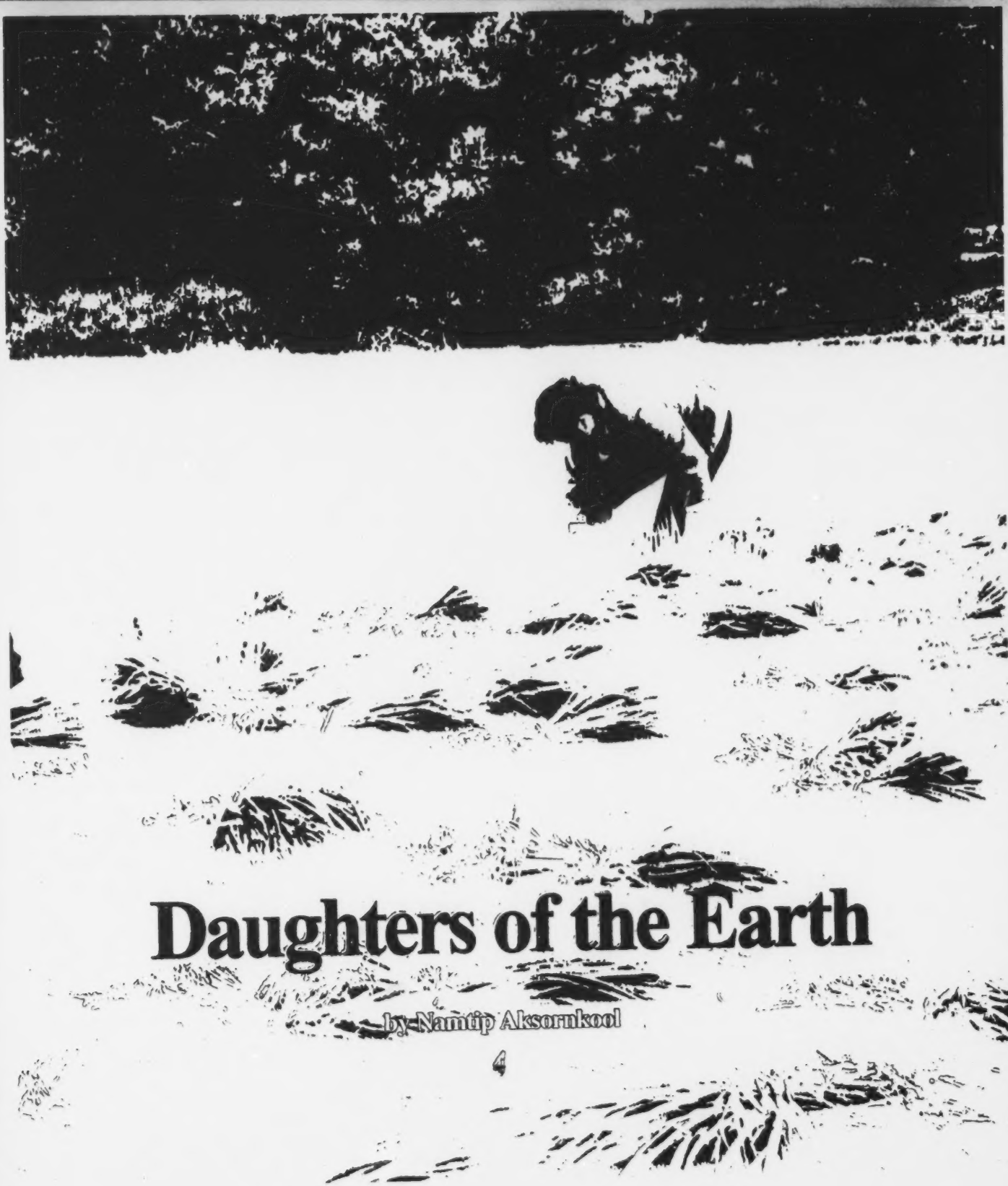

Daughters of the Earth

by Namtip Aksornkool

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Education for All: Making it Work

About the project...

The World Conference on Education for All, held in Jomtien, Thailand, in 1990, recognized that a policy of «more of the same» would not be sufficient to achieve the goal of education for all. Educational systems in most countries clearly need an injection of fresh ideas, a broader vision of how the basic learning needs of all might be met, and the courage to turn this vision into practice.

It was the quest for an expanded and renovated vision of basic education which prompted UNESCO and UNICEF to launch their joint project «EDUCATION FOR ALL: MAKING IT WORK» right after Jomtien. The two Organizations decided to disseminate and promote examples of educational change –both in the realm of formal and non- formal education– through which the principles of Jomtien would come to life: programmes which provide learning opportunities for children, youth, and adults, including underserved groups and those with special needs; programmes which focus on actual learning acquisition, rather than on mere participation or certification requirements; programmes which aim to provide a solid foundation for life-long learning, which are responsive to the learning needs and conditions of the socio-cultural environment, and which build effective partnerships with local communities and parents.

UNESCO and UNICEF believe that effective and sustainable change in education arises from the inventiveness, experience and dedication of educators, parents and community leaders at the grassroots. The «EDUCATION FOR ALL: MAKING IT WORK» project shows that educational innovation and change are already underway in all developing countries and that even the poorest countries are able to take up the challenge of devising educational programmes to fit their means, needs, and aspirations.

The project strategy emphasizes educational innovation in practice rather than discourse. The INNOV database presents many little-known experiences, some of them with considerable potential. The most promising and significant ones are showcased in the present series of booklets, or through films contained in the EDUCATION FOR ALL VIDEOBANK. Others are grouped together and compared in a new series of THEMATIC PORTFOLIOS, devoted to critical issues in basic education.

All these resource materials are used in training workshops, inter-project visits and similar activities meant to support specialists and planners from developing countries in their struggle to turn education for all into reality.

The project team will be pleased to receive new information, comments and suggestions from all those interested in promoting change and innovation in basic education. We particularly appeal to UNICEF and UNESCO colleagues in the field to co-operate actively with the project.

For more information about the project, please contact:

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"To serve the basic learning needs of all requires more than a recommitment to basic education as it now exists. What is needed is an 'expanded vision' that surpasses [...] conventional delivery systems while building on the best in current practices."

WORLD DECLARATION ON EDUCATION FOR ALL,

Article 2

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Introduction

Qi Yiling comes from a village in Xuan Wei County, hidden amongst the steep rocks and hills of the mountain province of Yunnan in China. Life here is not easy for anyone, particularly for women. The day is one long cycle of cooking, cleaning and washing, not to mention the hard work in the fields. There is never a moment to rest, never a moment to complain. This is a woman's life in the province of Yunnan.

Like most women in her village, Qi Yiling is completely illiterate. Recently, she had to collect her daughter from hospital. She got off the bus in the main market square but in her panic forgot to mark the tyres of the bus to take her home. Later when she returned with her sick daughter strapped to her back, she went round and round the bus station incapable of reading the signs or finding her bus. She didn't know where to go. She went left and right, too humiliated to ask anyone.

At home, in her village, Qi Yiling faces similar problems and doesn't do much better. She is constantly battling with the family, trying to keep everything going. Her husband doesn't understand or appreciate her feelings. When things go wrong, it is always her fault. Qi Yiling sometimes asks herself whether all this is worth it, why she doesn't just lie down and die. But Qi Yiling and thousands of other women like her, living in the remote mountain villages of Yunnan, need not feel as isolated as before. The All China Women's Federation, the Yunnan Education Commission, UNESCO, UNDP and the Ford Foundation have joined forces to improve life for the women of the region by forming a project called the Xuan Wei Skills-based Literacy Programme for Women. It teaches literacy but also encourages women to take control of their lives and income. Qi Yiling, for example, received intensive training in tree grafting skills, something she never even dreamed possible as the villagers believed that trees grafted by women never gave fruit. Last year's bumper harvest did much to dispel the myth that women bring bad luck.

There are many other women like Qi Yiling who have been able to increase their income and self-reliance. Shen Yidan, for instance, has managed to raise pigs. Through the project she learnt how to select healthy piglets, nurture them and give them the right feed. Women like Qi Yiling and Shen Yidan

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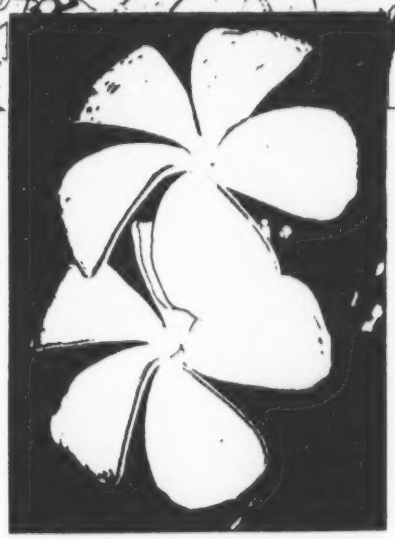
Aolo Musumeci

now lead a different and more fulfilling life. Their confidence in their strength and intelligence has increased. This important improvement in both living standards and self-reliance could not have come about without special measures and local will. The balance of power between men and women is slowly changing.



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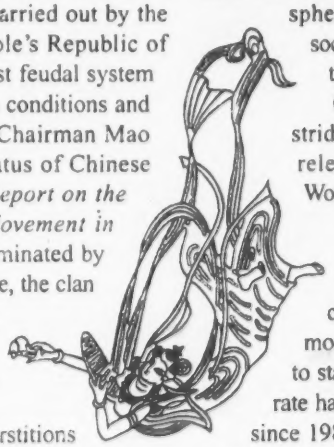
Women's status in China: beginnings of the programme

«In the former days of China, most women had no formal names before marriage. They adopted their husband's names after they were wed. Children used their father's name»
(The Situation of Chinese Women, All China Women's Federation, ACWF, 1994)

According to the recent *Study on Portrayal of Men and Women in Chinese School Textbooks and Children's Literature* carried out by the Ministry of Culture of the People's Republic of China and UNESCO, China's past feudal system has weighed heavily on women's conditions and status. Even as early as 1925, Chairman Mao Zedong noted the secondary status of Chinese women when he wrote in his *Report on the Investigation of the Peasant Movement in China,* that a Chinese man is dominated by three systems of authority, the State, the clan system and the supernatural. Chinese women, however, Mao said, are strangled by a fourth «thick rope»-men.



Common sayings and superstitions denigrating women abound throughout the world. The province of Yunnan has its own which go a long way in explaining the battle women have had to lead to assert their rights and gain access to education. The Dai community in southern Yunnan, for example, compares women to crabmeat, inferior even to mutton. If a Dai fisherman accidently touches a woman's sarong (skirt), he is, according to popular belief, haunted by witches and demons. The Sani people bar women from building houses as they believe a house built by a woman will collapse. The Han even have an old saying that «women and inferior men (slaves) are hard to get along with».

As women's emancipation was intimately related to the national liberation movement and the socialist revolution, it is considered an inseparable part of the ethics of New China. The law stipulates that women enjoy equal rights with men in all spheres of political, economic, cultural, social and family life and by comparison to their sisters in other countries, Chinese women have made great strides. Thanks to political will and the relentless efforts of the All China Women's Federation, Chinese women are no longer, in general, household servants.

Great achievements, in terms of education, have been made and the momentum is being kept up. According to statistics, since 1987, women's illiteracy rate has dropped to thirty-eight per cent and since 1986, 150 million people have attended training sessions in various practical technical skills, and half of these trainees were women. As a result, women's technical qualities and skills have been remarkably enhanced. Education has enabled farmers to be aware of the strength of women's work. Traditional models of division of labour with the man in charge have changed. A great number of women have started up businesses or became industrial workers and rural women are now important

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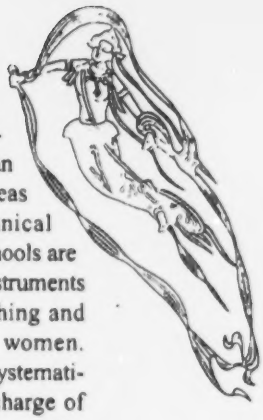

contributors to family income. Women now hold leading positions. There are women members in the Standing Committee of the National People's Congress and Chairwomen of the Chinese People's Political Consultative Conference. There are women ministers and women at governor and municipal level.

Although such remarkable achievements have been made in women's education in China, a number of problems and difficulties remain, particularly in remote and rural regions. There has been an inadequate balance in the spread of women's education and although education has been carried to most provincial prefectures, in many rural areas women's education is out of date and women's status, in both family and society, still apparently, lower than men's. Old traditional values have impeded progress. In rural areas, the ideology of «respect men, look down on women» can still dominate. For instance many poor farmers keep their daughters at home to manage the housework and the enrolment rate for girls is four per cent lower than that of boys. Of those children who do not enrol in school, eighty-three per cent are girls and they also make up seventy per cent of all the drop-outs from primary school.

Education personnel, funds, and material resources are, at times, inadequate and rural schools for adult education cannot cope with the scale of the task. There are not enough county, township or village technical schools for farmers. Less than ten per cent of adults in rural areas participate in cultural and technical education. In addition, a lot of schools are short of the necessary teaching instruments and equipment for modern teaching and literacy programmes for women. Furthermore, there is a need for systematically trained personnel to be in charge of both management and teaching. (The Report of the Regional Planning Meeting for the Skills-based Literacy Programme for Women, UNESCO/PROAP 1990).

Many experts in women's rights and adult educators believe that once women's earning capacity is strengthened, their status in society will automatically increase. Wang Rongxue, the project director for the Skills-based Literacy Programme for Women in Xuan Wei, gives the example of a woman from the Dali prefecture who started raising quails. Her status and standing began to rise with her income. It was not just a case of having greater earnings but the fact that she had the power to decide, the power to spend her money. In the past men dictated how the money was to be spent. According to the All China Women's Federation (ACWF), many couples now share in the decision-making process when it comes to money and other important family matters such as children's schooling.

This change is essential to the concept of empowerment that is central to the All China Women's Federation and the *UNESCO-UNDP Skills-based Literacy Programme for Women*. Both stress the idea of the «four selves» which are the four fundamental prerequisites for progress. These are self-reliance, self-esteem, self-confidence and self-improvement.

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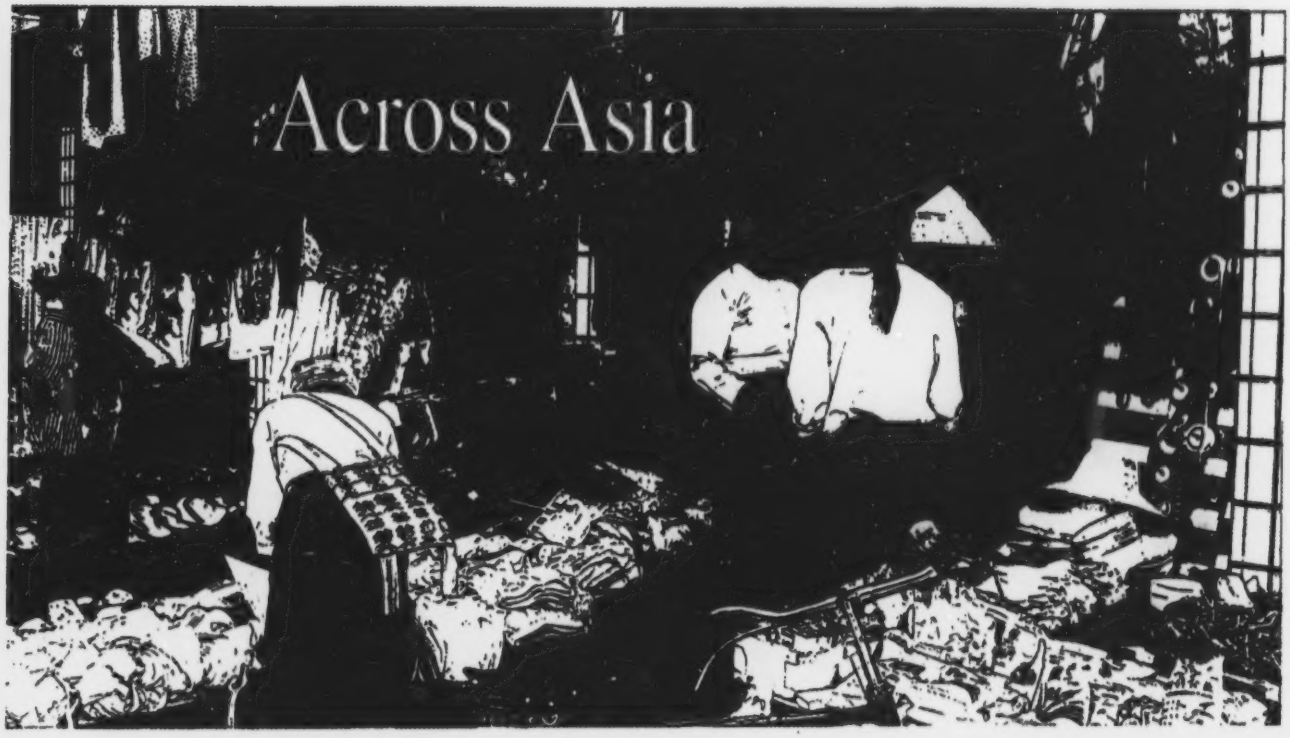
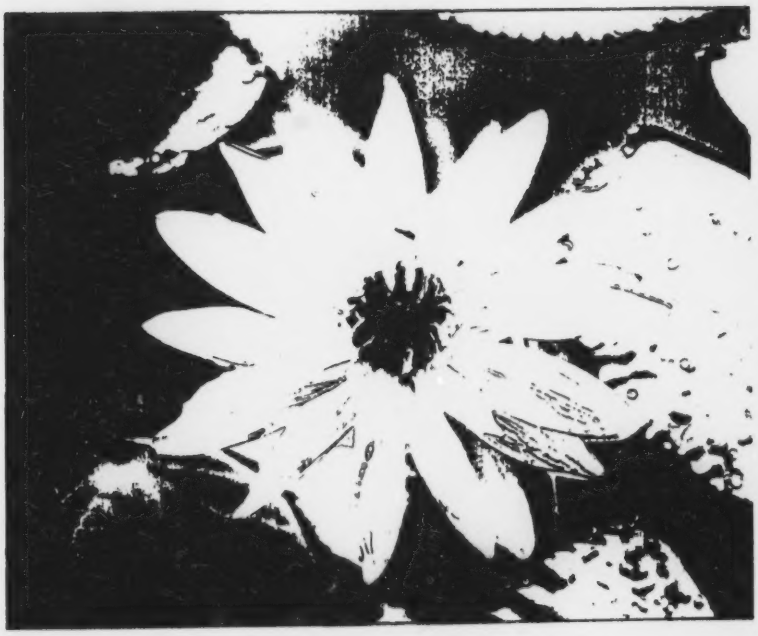


The Xuan Wei project is part of a larger regional project: RAS/88/013 Skills-based Literacy Programme for Women. Initiated in 1989 and implemented in 1990 with seed money of some one million U.S. Dollars from the United Nations Development Programme (UNDP), this regional project was designed to strengthen national capacity in preparing learning programmes which would equip women, of all ages, with knowledge, skills and attitudes to participate fully and meaningfully in national development. It was launched in seven countries in Asia and the Pacific - Bangladesh, Bhutan, China, the Lao People's Democratic Republic, Papua New Guinea, Union of Myanmar and Viet Nam. Within the vast framework of the project each participating country prepared an action plan for its respective select sites. In China, work began with a seminar hosted by the Yunnan Education Commission and the Chinese National Commission for UNESCO.

After the first regional training workshop and seminar, each country conducted five workshops of their own. The training programme concentrated on the theme of promoting women's status in society through enhancing knowledge, skills and attitudes. Methods of changing mentalities to lighten domestic burdens and demonstrate women's importance in production were set out and some twenty-nine booklets were developed as reading material. The units were written in accordance with the needs of the identified target group of women. Relevance to the lives of the learners was considered to be one of the most important elements.

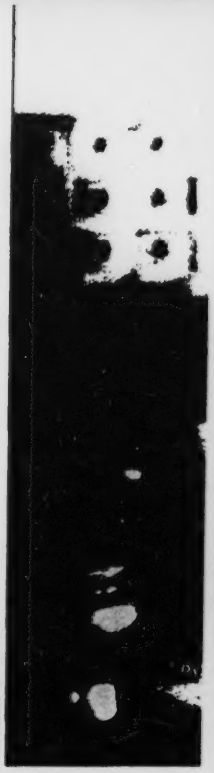
All the training followed certain guidelines and a curriculum, which have come to be known as the *«Educate to Empower»* approach. Indeed the culmination of all the preparatory work and the regional and national training was the publication of a manual entitled *«Educate to Empower»*. In many ways this text retraces the steps of the Skills-based Literacy Programme for Women. It spells out the whole basis



of the programme and has been essential in disseminating the programme which is now being replicated in the South Asian region (the ESCAP project on functional literacy for female youth is carrying the project to Malaysia and Pakistan). So far, *«Educate to Empower»* has been translated into eleven languages including Dzongka (Bhutan), Bahasa Melayu (Malaysia), Bangla (Bangladesh), Burmese, Chinese, Lao, Tok Pisin and Motu (Papua New Guinea), Thai, Urdu and Vietnamese. The manuals in each respective language were used to guide further in-country training. As a result subsequent workshops were able to concentrate on how to provide supplementary reading materials and curricular units. Some 700 pieces of learning material were then developed in the various languages of the participating countries.

The UNESCO Principal Regional Office for Asia and the Pacific (PROAP) was responsible for regional project execution and for facilitating inter-country co-operation. It also served as an advisory body and provided technical support for the countries when necessary. A team was then set up in each country for carrying out the various activities outlined in the individual country plan.

National problems, local solutions



«The economy of our country will approach the level of developed countries by its 100th anniversary. One of the reasons we say so is that we possess the power to develop education, to increase the scientific and technological manpower at all levels in time before the 2040's. Our country, its power and the potential of economic development depend increasingly on the quality of labour and the quantity and quality of the intellectuals.» *(Deng Xiaoping, 1985).*

This promise of progress by Deng Xiaoping has since modelled and structured the Chinese approach to both education and production. Education, as is obvious from the Xuan Wei experience, has to be led towards greater productivity and needs to meet the demands of the economy.

The Skills-based Literacy Programme for Women is, in fact, a unique mirroring of the country's needs and its educational goals. For many years, as Xu, Zheng, Little and Lewin note in *Educational Innovation in China* «rural school graduates... lacked knowledge of production and were unable to adapt themselves to the needs of the market economy. They had passed the examination of chemistry and physics but did not know the nature and uses of pesticides and agricultural machinery». When the Skills-based literacy Programme for Women was established in Xuan Wei county, it was precisely to remedy this kind of situation and to focus on the problems of rural women with little or no education.

Deng Xiaoping's 1985 introduction of the Responsibility System had also brought about dramatic shifts in agricultural practices and changes in the system of ownership. More and more farmers owned little plots of land yet the demand was for greater productivity and a great deal of farmland was being «eaten up» by industrialization. Small plots of land have to produce great quantities of food, so education and training are the only means to help establish agro-technology and help Xuan Wei maintain its self-reliance in food.

Xuan Wei county is a border area in the Yunnan Province of southwest China. The land is rugged and communication difficult, great distances separate one village from another. The province has some twenty-five minority groups and the existence of so many different ethnic groups over the centuries has led to a rich local culture where the acceptance of others features strongly. Only ten per cent of the land in Yunnan is arable and it requires a great amount of work but since ancient times terraced fields have been built into the mountains. The fields mould into the mountain landscape perfectly and are a typical example of humankind's adaptation to the demands of the land. Xuan Wei County is known throughout China for its ham production and the growing of maize and potatoes.

Here women are generally burdened with fourteen to eighteen hours work a day. This overwork and the multiplicity of tasks can lead to sickness and chronic health conditions. Women's opportunities are much more limited than men's, particularly in education and technical agricultural training. Young women may suffer from the ill effects of early marriage and not have the chance to develop their potential. An initial survey in the area noted that women played a very small role in deci-

sion-making and family business. The Skills-based Literacy Programme for Women was seen as instrumental in raising awareness. Women and girls seemed quite unaware of the power they could hold if they were to become active income earners. The benefits they could draw from literacy and training had, up till then, appeared almost irrelevant. This was particularly the case amongst women who lacked basic production skills and who had no chance of improving them - most of these women were illiterate. They didn't know how to make money with their products although they spent their days hard at work. Their economic status was as low as their belief in themselves.

Xuan Wei County became the seat of the project because it is a county that is typical of the Yunnan Province. It was felt that if the project was successful in this particular region it could be replicated elsewhere. Furthermore, the area had already served for various other ventures: the «Spark» Project, the Project for «Enough to Eat and Wear», an FAO project and a Population Education Project. These projects had proved successful and had paved the way for a wider, more comprehensive project such as the Skills-based Literacy Programme for Women.

The Xuan Wei County authority, under the Skills-based Literacy Programme for Women, runs some seventy-five skills training classes. Women can choose the courses they want and are advised on those which best suit their situation. They also include other skills necessary for the improvement of living standards such as pre- and post natal care, health care, family planning, and various income-generating skills. The women of Xuan Wei have very few moments in the day to stop and rest. Their life is a continuous cycle of labour and fatigue. As education and training had been seen as a privilege often exclusive to men, the women too had to be convinced that they could learn and that they would not be wasting their time. Moreover, they could choose what to learn. What they learnt would be useful to their work and actually boost the productivity on their farms and, hence, their economic self-reliance.

By purposely linking literacy to actual production and other vital aspects of daily life, the project was able to create a demand for learning. This valuing and relevance of education means more and more women want their children to get a good education. Before it would have been the man who would have gone to the programme or made the decisions about the children or the farm, now it is the women who go to classes and it is difficult to imagine how the trend can be reversed. It is hard to comprehend the enormous benefits experienced by these illiterates-turned-readers. As those responsible for the Skills-based Literacy Programme for Women say these women now feel that «they can do anything».

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Reading and writing

Sixty-six per cent of illiterates in Xuan Wei County are women. Literacy classes take place in the early evening around seven to nine o'clock. The women sit by hurricane lamps and learn to read and write the basic 1,500 Chinese characters following standard textbooks. The material covers a wide range of topics from classics like Aesop's fables and Chinese war stories to practical skills, such as pig raising, duck, chicken or quail raising and dofu making or family issues. There is also teaching of arithmetic, simple accounting and abacus use. The activities in the classroom vary but generally, it is a facilitator-centred approach. There are songs about the virtues of literacy which learners enjoy singing among themselves or to their friends.

Once learners acquire a basic level of literacy, they can carry onto more interesting post-literacy books printed with the assistance of the project. To support these literacy activities, the project produces supplementary reading materials in practical Chinese, mathematics, post-literacy and continuing education. According to Wang Rongxue, the project director, it is difficult for these women to relapse into illiteracy because, even in far-flung villages, new literates are exposed to written words such as posters and wall newspapers. Newsletters are now being sent out to villages.

Due to the lack of learning texts for the teaching of productive skills, the various townships in the county produce their own materials on technical subjects such as pig raising, bee keeping, mushroom cultivation, fruit tree planting, sewing, embroidery, grain production techniques, township and village enterprises. Since functional contents are also covered in the standard literacy text and classes, learners are taken to observe and try out actual practices of new technology at an experimental farm connected to a secondary vocational school. Women can also observe professional embroidery work.

In cases where learners choose to learn skills for future employment in factories, their newly-acquired skills are tried out during a two-month probation period. During this period it is established whether the learner has reached the standard required for employment or whether further training is needed.

At the same time, videotapes, slides, posters and supplementary learning materials are exposed to the learners. As the literacy workers also teach primary school classes, methods used with primary school learners are often used on women learners. The teachers stand at the front of rows of desks and benches. The learners read along with the teacher, read individually and then in unison. The learners, for example, match synonyms or fill in the blanks. They also learn to use the roman alphabet to read Chinese characters they can't pronounce. The approach to literacy training is continually strengthened by the successful integration of topics adjusted to women's needs. For example, one former textbook showed a man writing letters to another man. The present textbook now shows a woman writing to another woman.

By closely co-operating with the community, the Skills-based Literacy Programme for Women has succeeded in creating a conducive climate which has lent support to community development and raised public concern for the need to educate women. Committees have been established and sub-projects founded to generate interest in the general thrust towards development and literacy. To make sure women attended classes regularly was no

easy feat. The project organizers and the All China Women's Federation (ACWF) had to carry out door to door campaigns. Teams were organized to ensure women did come to classes and men were encouraged to look after the home in their absence. The teams talked to reticent parents and husbands, persuaded them that women should be allowed to come to school. As women often have to walk long distances to classes in the evening, the community ensures their safety by electing members to serve as security guards for learners. These «guards» show up at the end of each evening class and escort the learners home. The local media disseminated information on women's education to the county population. Some twenty-three articles were published altogether. Blackboards and wall newspapers were put up in the villages and written materials were spread around to mobilize the greatest number of literates to help in the drive for literacy. It is an inherent part of the programme to work with the media for the promotion of women's status, to develop publicity materials and to link project activities to other ventures.

To encourage the women to come to classes and learn literacy skills, the programme designed an original strategy for easing women's household burdens. Recognizing the unjust balance of power between men and women, the project urged men to take on their share of the housework. Men are shown that they can play a significant role in the education of their children and the family has a chance to better itself by sharing responsiblities. Household chores are no longer to be seen as burdens but rather a chance for husband and wife to come together with their children.

Initially the project met with local resistance and came up against the remnants of feudal concepts of male superiority. As Wang Rongxue says the programme is trying to break traditions and mentalities. Many men objected to their wives or daughters attending lessons when there was so much work at home.

Women who participate in the project vary in age and educational background. Young girls of sixteen learn alongside forty year old mothers. Some are still illiterates, others have been to school and dropped out. Some were fortunate enough to stay until the end of primary school. A few were even luckier - they finished junior secondary school. All had finally accepted their inferior status -they themselves didn't consider they should be educated. The multiple background of learners has proved to be an asset as more educated learners can help others whilst everyone learns at their own pace. The heterogenous background and age of the participants added to the challenge facing the project. It affects the content selection and, to a certain extent, the training methods. But despite their differences, these women now share a common purpose.

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Teachers and facilitators

In the 1980's China began a new drive for education reform. One important move was that primary schools should be run and financed by the communities themselves. The Skills-based Literacy Programme for Women encourages each school to assume a two-pronged function - as a primary school during the day and as an adult learning centre in the evening. This means, each facilitator (teacher) has to teach two classes, one for children and one for adults. In return for this extra-work, they receive a subsidy of ten per cent of their salary. The township shoulders the responsibility of covering the facilitator's subsidy which in Xuan Wei county is rather low.

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For the production training, the organizers of the project call upon health workers or agricultural officers to give lectures and demonstrate new farming techniques. Specialists from organizations like the Agricultural or Livestock departments and experts on local crafts regularly run training which can last between half a day to two weeks.

Fifty-eight project administrative personnel were trained by the Provincial government and thirty other personnel were trained by the County Government. A hundred and sixty-one facilitators were trained, and altogether ninety-six teaching material compilers were trained by the State, Provincial and District Governments and UNESCO.

Top level project administrators such as the director and managers were trained at regional level alongside their counterparts from other participating countries. They joined study visits such as those to central and northern Thailand to observe non-formal education programmes for women.

They also attended the three regional training workshops for curricular material development in India and Thailand in 1990 and 1992. The training, or orientation, was in project management and monitoring, programme planning and curricular and material development. At the regional workshops, they underwent participatory training where they had hands-on experience in preparing gender-sensitive curricular units which were later published in Chinese for use in the project.

Those who received wider regional training, in turn, trained programme co-ordinators at county, township and village level. Again, training workshops were aimed at preparing post-literacy material. For practical purposes, the training materials were derived from the manual *«Educate to Empower»*, produced by the project and available in Chinese. Training also covered gender sensitivity in women's education as well as how to use reading materials among villagers.

Designing relevance: material development

In recent years, questions have been raised as to whether traditional contents and materials in non-formal education designed for women actually contribute to learners' progress and overall development. Analysis of sample material across the world points to the fact that conventional material has often been irrelevant to women's real needs and ignores their actual conditions.

Most conventional materials for women learners are related to only one of women's multiple functions - that of mother and wife. There has been an unbalanced concentration on improving domestic work, childcare and nutrition and sanitation. While these are important they are not the only work women have to do. Advocates of alternative approaches have argued that «non-conventional» material designed with sensitivity could contribute to women's development as well as to the development of their society and nation.

Wang Rongxue, programme director, is convinced that his programme cannot be successful without being relevant to women's actual problems and conditions. «We give them what they ask for and not what we have to offer and since they are farmers looking for ways to improve production, we show them how to improve production». This is one of the most important lessons learnt from the programme.

Women's productivity as earners and farmers is rarely reflected in the texts or illustrations of conventional material. In so doing, according to K. Chlebowska in *Literacy for Rural Women in the Third World*, authors are sending a message to learners that women «don't contribute to productivity or that their contribution doesn't count». Women learners are deprived of realistic and positive role models. When women's work is covered, it is often as if their activities are no more than an extension of their domestic roles. Educational specialists have explained this in terms of society's belief that women's paid work is «secondary and contingent» since they are, anyway, considered financially dependent on their husbands.

Relevance was, therefore, seen to be the key to the acceptance of the programme. For the materials

in Xuan Wei care was taken to follow the three main principles in preparing material for women, namely: recognition of women's double responsiblity (as housekeepers and economic producers), the need to acknowledge and strengthen women's productive contribution, activities and potential and the realization that when women's productive roles are strengthened, the balance of power between men and women will become more equitable and women's domestic tasks lightened and facilitated.

The material produced within the regional context of the Skills-based Literacy Programme for Women shows how women's economic self-reliance, self-confidence, self-respect, self-improvement and status within society can be enhanced if the following conditions are met.

Condition I:
Presentation of women's actual condition and double responsibilities.

The needs assessment conducted in the target areas was long and thorough. It became clear during the survey that women's work was being taken for granted. Prejudices remained. Women worked long hours, society didn't recognize their contribution, they had limited access to education and training. The material, therefore, was adapted to translate this situation into words so that learners could see a realistic portrayal of their lives.

In one book, *Cashing in on Cornleaves*, women are portrayed labouring in domestic chores. Danfen in the text *Chicken Care* is seeking new ways to make much-needed cash. In *Beautiful and Productive Courtyard*, Qiaozhen, a young married woman, works alongside her husband and in-laws to

make the most of their land. Xi Mei, a young mountain girl, with her baby sister strapped to her back watches longingly as her brothers go to school. Xi Mei is shown as conditioned into accepting that she, as a female, has to accept her status and more than her fair share of the household burden.

Condition II:
Enhancing economic productivity

The most basic prerequisite for empowerment is economic self-reliance. Everywhere in rural Xuan Wei, women following literacy and agro-technology classes say they are doing so to «become rich». All material reflects this desire for lucrative activities: Xi Mei is fish farming, Dongfeng is using modern techniques in chicken care, Fuji has become successful in the craft business and A Xiang is using new farming skills. These are a few examples of the skills women can master and want to learn. By proving women can be successful with these materials, the message is clear - women, like men have the potential to master science and technology.

The material is effective because it provides knowledge and skills that relate directly to local conditions. The project appreciates the women's social, cultural and educational background and their potential as well as the limitations that exist in the Province of Yunnan (weather, water and soil conditions). For example, mushroom growing is particularly appropriate in Yunnan where more than 200 varieties of mushroom thrive. Similarly, taken Xuan Wei County's fame for ham, production and pig-raising could be enhanced. The material is clearly based on scientific knowledge. Material developers and agricultural officials work together to prepare adapted learning material that is technically accurate and, at the same time, reflects the learners's environment. It is easy to understand for learners with limited reading skills and experience. Co-operation between farmers, workers and material developers carries on with training sessions. During these sessions, the agricultural experts demonstrate, in actual conditions, how to improve crops or livestock. Follow-up sessions are vital if the learners, in turn, are to become competent and able to teach others. Lastly the skills taught go well beyond simple production skills. They also cover management skills, including accounting, decison making, problem solving, managing people and allocating resources.

Condition III:
Promoting women's status in society.

Portraying actual conditions is only a part of the success of the material. This does not mean these conditions are accepted unconditionally. On the contrary, the texts condemn overburdening housework and the way young girls are deprived of education. In the *Changing of a Girl's Life*, Xi Mei's persistent desire to learn leads to heated discussions between the teacher and her parents on whether girls should be educated. The teacher wins the argument and takes Xi Mei in. The text then shows Xi Mei's progress until she becomes a model farmer and receives the title of «sister of a thousand yuan».

Qiaozhen, in *Beautiful and Productive Courtyard*, is an active learner at the night school where she learns new farming techniques. With her growing confidence, she convinces her husband to start an integrated farming project on their plot of land. She ends up teaching other village women how to turn their courtyards into orchards. When the villagers congratulate the husband on his success, he points to her and proudly says it was «Qiaozhen's idea».

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Condition IV:
Lightening women's domestic work

From the needs assessment, it was clear that women in Xuan Wei were continually busy and occupied- both inside and outside the home. The literacy and training material reflects the emerging trend in China, where men accept more and more of their share of the housework and childcare. In *Murderer in your House*, for example, Jinfeng is seen enjoying her hard-earned income whilst her husband reads funny stories to the children. Qioazhen in *Beautiful and Productive Courtyard* is shown by candle light as her husband talks to their small daughter. When Qiaozhen works her daughter works too. They laugh a great deal and what was previously a chore is turned into a co-operative effort.

So for many years the mistaken traditional idea that women's work was housework has determined the contents of literacy materials and restricted their themes. The so-called female skills, like tailoring, embroidery and handicraft arts have usually made up the educational materials for women but it makes no sense to teach them how to paint little flowers when their concern is how to produce a solid and healthy pig. Furthermore, vocational skills will continue to have little effect unless they are linked to management or entrepreneurial abilities. This is the strength of the Skills-based Literacy Programme for Women which answers specific needs in a particular area. It is prepared to first fill the technology gap by educating women in modern agro-technology and afterwards prepare them to cope with China's shift towards a market economy. The pupils need not go through examinations, or sit through endless classes on irrelevant material. Their test lies in the application of what they have learnt in their farming techniques and production. So much so that their family's well-being is at stake, if they fail. A great challenge and reward for them also lies in the immediate use of their new knowledge and skills without having to wait for graduation. Successful experiments in farming can be replicated to hundreds of farmers rapidly. This innovation is vital to the success of the programme and ensures that a woman is rewarded with the satisfaction that her technique is helping other women in the same situation. It encourages the women to come up with new methods but also gives them a strong sense of duty and citizenship. The farming system of the programme is at the heart of its success.

Management and co-ordination with other ongoing projects

The Skills-based Literacy Programme for Women is closely co-ordinated to agricultural agencies as well as to other activities involving women such as the «Spark project» conducted by the Science and Technology Commission to develop township and village enterprises. The programme also worked with a project run by the Agricultural Department, «Project for Enough to Eat and Wear» and the project «Activities of Study and Competition in Both Aspects». The Skills-based Literacy Programme for Women is, moreover, also directly linked to programmes supported by the UN Food and Agriculture Organization (FAO) and the United Nations Fund for Population Activities (UNFPA).

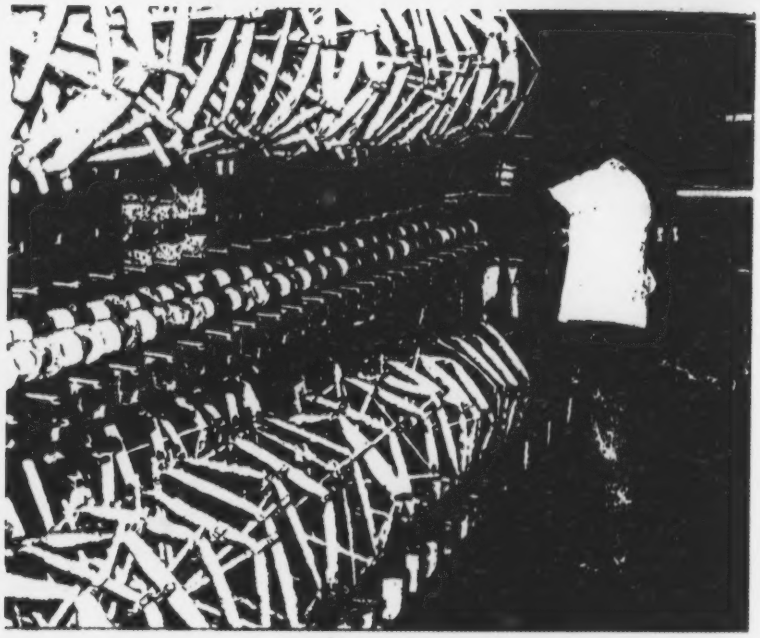
As these projects were already operational in Xuan Wei County, they greatly eased the introduction of the Skills-based Literacy Programme for Women. And since they were all under government sponsorship, they shared the same directive. It seemed only wise to maximise chances of success by pooling human, material and funding resources together to support the overall activities.

Monitoring and evaluation

One of the project's major strengths is regular and systematic monitoring. Monitoring was done at three levels -county, province and regional. In China, project managers, led by the county adult education chief, visited the villages on the project site at six month intervals. Formal reports were also submitted to the provincial and prefecture authorities. The provincial focal point for project implementation in Kunming also paid a yearly visit to the Xuan Wei project site, where discussions on project progress and obstacles were carried out. There are also informal visits allowing for close observation of project activities as well as interaction with learners, their families, community leaders, facilitators and co-ordinators. As this is a wider regional project, arrangements were made for progress sharing at all three regional training workshops. In addition, two tripartite reviews were organized in 1992 and 1994. At the tripartite reviews, obstacles in project implementation were discussed among country representatives, UNDP and UNESCO. The tripartite review discussions were based on the papers each country prepared prior to attending the review, and based on common guidelines.

Consultants were also sent from UNESCO PROAP to assess the strengths and weaknesses of the project and to discuss ways and means of expanding the project into other areas in Yunnan. In assessing progress and identifying areas for improvement, care was also taken to qualitatively review material produced as well as to verify that those who had undergone training in the project were applying the knowledge and skills they acquired in their everyday work. Informal communication with individuals at all levels added a degree of authenticity to official reporting. Anecdotal details on the impact of the project on learners' lives are recorded in all fields although systematic individual follow-up of learners is not available to date. For future project monitoring this gap might have to be bridged.

The earning capacity of participants of the Skills-based Literacy Programme has risen considerably. New skills double or even triple income. The example of Shu Ling from Lai Ping Township is revealing. Before the Xuan Wei programme she earnt well below the average per capita rate for the province which is of some Y 600/year (40 US dollars). She had to depend on government subsidies for fertilizer, food and medicine. After a couple of



months of machine embroidery training, Shu Ling became the best learner and was able to earn enough to live without subsidies. This newly-found self-reliance gave her confidence in her capacities and she is currently saving up to buy herself an embroidery machine. Another woman Lhuo Lu Lin, aged forty followed the advice of those teaching her on the farming programme of the Skills-based Literacy Programme and began to grow fruit trees on her strip of land. She soon had to hire two workers and get her brother and sister-in-law involved. Her present income stands at Y 10, 000 a year (900 US dollars). She is using the money to buy household goods, rice cookers and children's clothes.

Achievements have been reported throughout Xuan Wei county: 36,000 illiterate women have become literate and the illiteracy rate among young girls has dropped twenty nine per cent to below the average for the whole province. Some 313 classes were held for technical training, these were attended by 275,000 women between the ages of thirty and fifty. Out of these women some 7,215 were then able to play a major role in carrying out new production and management techniques. There were over seventy five training courses, mainly techniques for growing vegetables or animal breeding, which cover subjects such as health care, ecological matters and other production and living skills. The social and economic benefits of the training courses which were attended by many people were considerable and specific technical advances greatly contributed to the well-being of the villagers. For example, energy-saving kitchen stoves were built which managed to conserve forty-two per cent more heat and limit pollution within the home. The maize harvest was increased through the simple technique of close planting of seeds and the latest pig-breeding techniques meant an average thirty one per cent rise in earnings and greater sanitation.

It is not enough, though, to measure the achievements of the programme in terms of economics and material well-being. By becoming literate the women open up a whole wealth of possibilities. By joining literacy classes, one woman Chu Yun Song, managed to turn part of her house into a small mushroom growing concern. It's not that she just learnt about mushrooms but as she says «I learnt to read brand names of goods in the market, I learnt to read about methods of mushroom farming». She now manipulates glasstubes, chemicals and special lamps with great skill. This transformation after the literacy programme is compared to a kind of revelation by many of the women. One young villager remembers how she used to get lost in the streets of Kunming as she couldn't read the signs. This same woman now has a small shop and sells clothes. She feels capable of doing much more and is aware of the possibilities ahead. Du, a young mother, remembers how when she was young there was no possibility of schooling. Girls didn't go to school. She herself was illiterate only three years ago but now conducts embroidery classes. These changes have transformed the balance of power that used to dominate the lives of many of these women.

Political will and local structures were such that they helped the programme reach out to the widest group of people possible. Those co-ordinating the project did all they could to ensure the sustainability of the programme by monitoring and listening to feedback. They did not hesitate in front of corrective measures and made sure that participants and facilitators were well-suited to the programme.

Furthermore, the various skills of the participants and facilitators were deliberately focussed on those which seemed the best adapted to the project's targets.

Funding sources were purposely diversified to avoid the programme becoming dependent on one source. The implementation of the Skills-based Literacy Programme for Women has reached a wide range of poor women from the farming communities of one of the poorest areas of China, but has cost the country not more than 810,000 Yuan (54,000 US dollars). Of this, 200,000 Yuan (18,000 US dollars) were provided by the Yunnan Province; 130,000 Yuan (10,000 US dollars) by the districts and 430,000 Yuan (31,000 US dollars) by the county. UNESCO contributed 33,000 US dollars worth of seed money which was used for:

- organization of training of managers and teachers
- printing of nine booklets of 20,000 copies
- gender-sensitive material development
- equipment such as camera and computer
- regional training and field visits

By comparison with other non-formal education programmes, the cost per head of this project is amazingly low. This, as well as the drastic increase in the learners' income means that the programme has been remarkably cost-effective.

In brief the project's strengths can be stated as the following:

- a centralized planning combined with a well-established management structure from the provincial level down to the village level,
- involvement of the local Women's Federation to provide external support to the project, e.g. mobilizing learners, intervention when learner's family prohibit participation and launching a campaign to promote the lightening of women's domestic workload,
- serious focus on women's income- earning capacity combined with health and civic awareness,
- effective co-ordination between various relevant ministries: education, agriculture, health, environment,
- pooling of resources from donor agencies, eg UNDP, UNESCO, WFP,
- overall, the matching of socio-economic goals of the nation with individual needs and aspirations has been the major hallmark of this project. It has meant a particularly pragmatic version of «functional relevance» which has led the project to success, despite its relatively traditional educational base.

As the Skills-based Literacy Programme for Women will continue its fight to improve the condition and education of women in Xuan Wei County, improvement will be needed in the following fields:

- continued upgrading of personnel involved in the project, notably as concerns gender-sensitivity,
- future project activities need to involve and educate husbands and children to a greater degree;
- the empowerment aspect of the programme could be strengthened.

Finally, if the full impact of the project is to be measured, the improvement in income, the effect on children's education and changes in family patterns need to be monitored in a simultaneous fashion.

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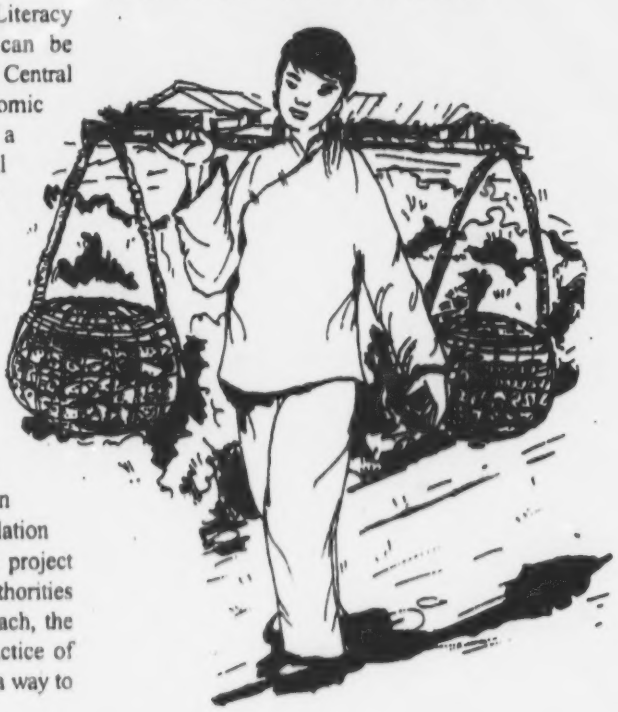
Conclusion

It is obvious from the Chinese experiment of the Skills-based Literacy Programme for Women that literacy and production projects for women need to tackle the issues which lie at the heart of the learners' aspirations and feelings. Effective literacy materials alone do not guarantee an improvement in women's productive roles. The successful programmes run in Xuan Wei county show that education for development must also reinforce a woman's self-esteem. The Xuan Wei programme is already a success in terms of its outreach, sustainability and measurable economic improvement. It shows that non-formal education can be used to enhance national economic development and that women have a vital role to play in the process.

This success of the Skills-based Literacy Programme for Women in Xuan Wei can be explained in many ways. Firstly the Chinese Central Government's policy to strengthen economic progress in the remote rural areas formed a solid basis for the programme and non-formal education was seen as the most effective way of delivering science and technology to a population previously deprived of education of any kind. Secondly the Government's goals were swiftly translated into definitive directives and disseminated to people who were able to identify with them.

Ingenious methods of assessing the economic potential of the region and then combining this with the needs of the population were turned into a pragmatic and realistic project approach. Furthermore, once the project authorities were convinced of the merit of their approach, the project was integrated into the existing practice of non-formal education in Yunnan and found a way to sustain itself and even expand into other areas. The fact that the programme responds closely to women's needs and that participants' achievements are tangible and visible created further credibility in the community around.

In short, the project and the scale of its success have been made possible because of a convergence of the government's economic goals, the villager's actual needs, the integration of gender issues into learning material and a pragmatic approach perhaps unique to China. The single greatest conclusion to come out of the Yunnan Programme is that quite apart from literacy, basic education for women, whether it be formal or non-formal, is the best investment China can make for its future.



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FEATURES

Making it work

An original leader

In his late forties, Wang Rongxue, or Lao Wong as his junior colleagues call him, spends most of his time travelling along the bumpy roads of Yunnan to remote and isolated villages. As he says «if clients are unable to come to us, we have to bring education to them». As Yunnan's director of adult education and co-ordinator of the Skills-based Literacy Programme for Women, his job is very demanding, both physically and mentally.

In market places around Xuan Wei, one can still see women with stunted feet deformed by binding limping down the street. The sight of their gait is painful. «Bound feet were a form of oppression», says Wang RongXue. «It restricted women's movement.» It is this kind of ancient tradition which has been around for 2,000 years that cannot be done away with in a short amount of time. Although he calls himself only a co-ordinator, Wang Rongxue's knowledge of the programme is intimate and his commitment total. He doesn't teach any skills himself but has a complete awareness of the curriculum. For example, his own experience in rice seed planting meant he could see how poor the conditions were in Xuan Wei and, indeed, how dangerous they were for women's health. Wang Rongxue has a natural talent for striking up conversation, a talent which has served him considering he has to go and meet thousands of poor farmers every year. When asked how the project can enhance women's status, Wang Rongxue insists «first let them make their money and learn to spend it». He is convinced that women's decision-making power increases as their income rises. With that power, their self-confidence grows which, in turn, forms a strong basis for other forms of progress. Wang Rongxue could quote the names of hundreds of women, both young and old, who have managed to double or even triple their income thanks to the new skills they learnt with the Skills-based Literacy Programme for Women.

Empowerment: not pitting women against men

Programmes in the past concentrated on women's reproductive role and not on their important role as economic producers. This left women dissatisfied and neglected their contribution to society. Empowerment is a process and not just a state, it means a woman can slowly gain control of her life, assert her rights at all levels, both local and national, and achieve economic, political and social autonomy. It should not, however, be seen as a simplistic «pitting of women against men». It is more important to stress the collaboration between the sexes and the benefits that can be had from giving women the chance to express themselves.

An empowered woman: a profile

- The empowered woman appreciates the time she spends on domestic work and outside the home.

- She is aware that overwork is harmful to her physical and mental condition and that health is vital.

- She is able to question her double responsibility and seeks help from others to have enough leisure to spend on learning and participating in the social and political life of the community.

- The empowered woman appreciates the value of her contribution whether remunerated or not. She is aware that she has tremendous potential to contribute to the progress of her family, community and nation. She is confident of her worth, is open-minded and can appreciate others.

- Aware of her productivity, she seeks to improve her skills and knowledge continuously. She uses information sources (such as extension services, available and relevant technology) and makes sure she benefits from them. She appreciates the knowledge gained from reading and reads regularly.

- The empowered woman understands that she is a human being and can control her life. Hence, she could and should question the family and social practices which negatively affect her. She seeks to get scientific insights into superstitions and challenges those which are unjust to women.

- She has freedom of movement and expression on a par with men. She appreciates her strengths and weaknesses and seeks self-improvement. She can lead and serve as a positive role model for other women.

- The empowered woman is aware of her rights as a citizen and protects them actively. She is convinced of her equality with men. She knows which laws and legal proceses treat women unfairly and seeks to use her legal knowledge to protect her own and other women's rights.

- The empowered woman respects herself and dares take credit and responsibility for her contribution and action. She looks for options and makes informed decisions. She dares to be different and creative.

- The empowered woman is aware that her health is related to the number of children she has. She respects the dignity of womanhood and appreciates daughters in the same way she does sons.

- The empowered woman nurtures herself. She wants everybody to understand that, as a human being, she is entitled to happiness in the same way that others are. She has a zest for life.

From «The Empowered Woman» 1995,
UNESCO/PROAP

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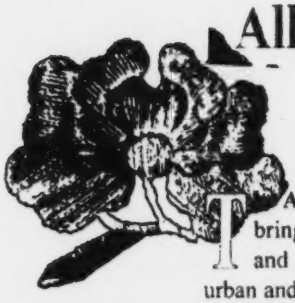
All China Women's Federation



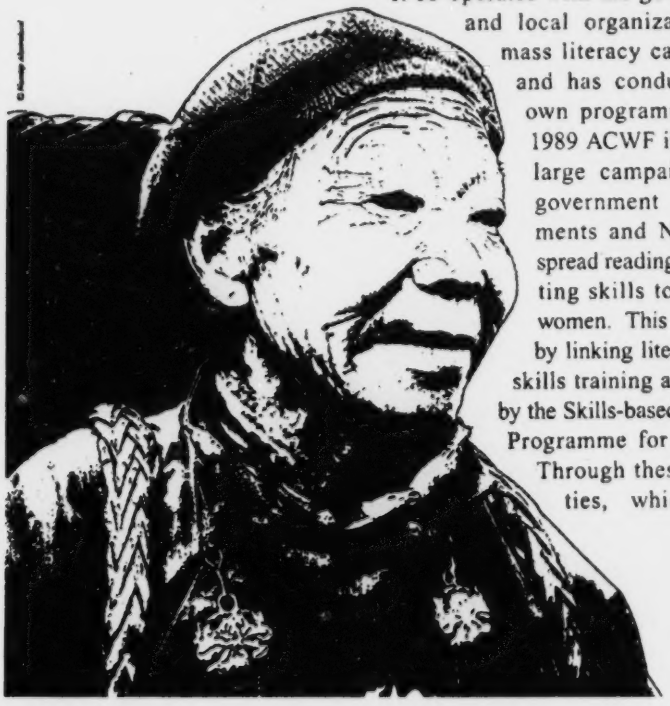
TACWF, *the All China Women's Federation*, brings together women from all walks of life and all national ethnic groups. With units in urban and rural areas throughout the country, it is a powerful network and support group for women and girls.

The ACWF was one of the four literacy prize winners rewarded by UNESCO in 1995

ACWF's relentless literacy work for women and girls has, undoubtedly, contributed to all national illiteracy eradication efforts. So much so that the illiteracy rate among the population aged fifteen and over was reduced from about eighty per cent in 1985 to sixteen per cent in 1994 and among women from ninety-five to twenty-three per cent in the same period. Women make up over sixty-five per cent of the 50 million illiterates who have become literate in the past four years.

As over seventy per cent of China's illiterates are women and the State Council, in 1988, published its *«Regulations on Eradicating Illiteracy»*, the Federation has stepped up the pace of its battle. It co-operates with the government and local organizations in mass literacy campaigns and has conducted its own programmes. In 1989 ACWF initiated a large campaign with government departments and NGOs, to spread reading and writing skills to peasant women. This was done by linking literacy with skills training as is done by the Skills-based Literacy Programme for Women. Through these activities, which have benefited 120 million women farmers throughout the country, some 20 million have become literate and a further 96 million have received solid practical training. 1,5 million women have been able to take part in rural schools for adults and 510, 000 have qualified as agricultural technicians. At the beginning of the 1990's the Federation started to reward individuals and organizations for their achievements in literacy work. The increased public appraisals and competiveness of prize winners gave further impetus to campaigns. The move spread to the grassroots units where local literacy contests for farming women were organized for those who were judged successful in their performance.

Besides its numerous literacy projects, the ACWF upholds women's rights and responsibilities. At the recent 1994 joint ACWF/State Education Commission, it was decided that the eradication of illiteracy should be the major goal for the 1990's. Extensive publicity efforts surround the Federation's campaigns and it has been instrumental in changing attitudes and overcoming traditional taboos.



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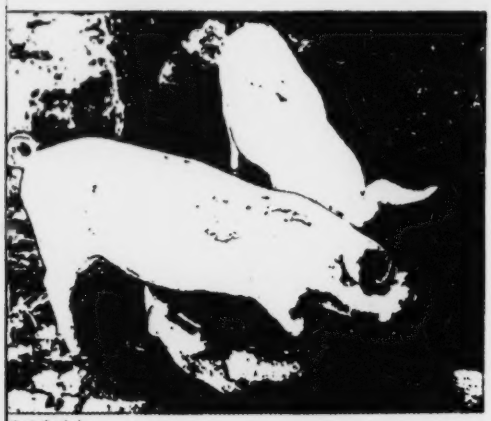
The pig-raising

«Pigs are extremely dirty» cries Xi Yanfeng, «but I'm happy». Her happiness should come as no surprise for those who have seen her develop over the last year. At sixteen, she has managed to make quite some money out of pig raising. Before her little business, the family had to struggle to make money but now her mother and she have some fifteen pigs. Their life is taken up by caring for the pigs and follows a daily pattern. Between six thirty in the morning and one o'clock in the afternoon, the women mix and prepare the feed, clean the sty, go to the fields, pull weeds and then feed the animals.



«You can't go wrong when you breed pigs» says Wang Rongxue. «The possibilities for selling are vast and no matter how many you breed you can sell them.» Pork is traditionally the most popular and cheapest meat in China. A recent article in the *China Daily* noted with alarm, though, that the increasing price of corn and pig feed is hampering pork production. This is of course critical for all breeders in rural areas. Yao Yong a project officer from the Skills-based Literacy Programme for Women feels that it is up to the programme to educate women and villagers to diversify their activities. Education can be crucial in teaching people, for example, to feed the pigs on grass, corn branches, stems, roots and wild bananas rather than on corn itself.

Sisters of a Thousand Yuan

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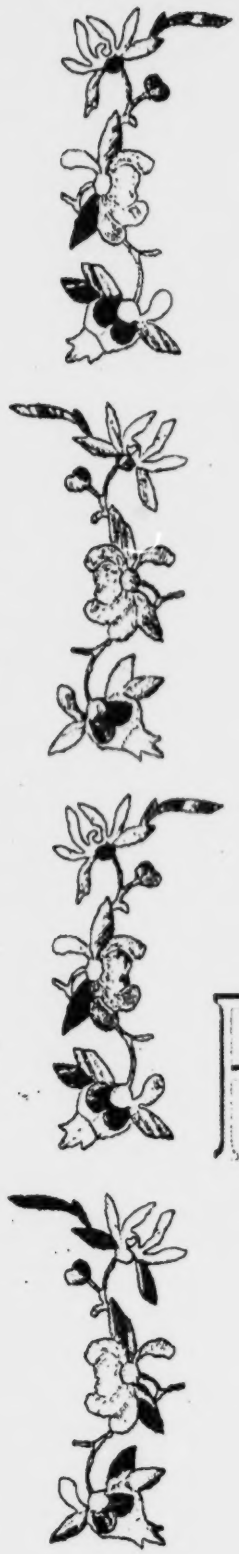

Facilitators: a changed vision

«I have many happy memories of my training in Thailand» says Lao Wu as he welcomes his visitors to Xuan Wei County where he heads the adult education section. Along with seventeen other men and women from ten countries in Asia and the Pacific, Lao Wu took part in a three-week residential and intensive learning programme in Thailand. In his first week of the course, on the Gulf of Siam, he remembers how shocked he was at discovering his own attitudes. The drawing activity, for example, required the participants to depict some farmers at work. When the drawings were shown around, it was realized that everyone had drawn pictures of men although it is estimated that more than half of China's food is grown by women (seventy five per cent of employed women are in farm work). Lao Wu was forced, for the first time in his life, to see his own stereotyped view. Several activities like this led to an analysis of learning materials and women's role in society. Upon his return to Xuan Wei, he began to train others and sought to reverse the prejudices he detected in his male colleagues.

Health workers

On the high mountain cliffs overlooking Guizhon Province, sickness is a curse. The nearest hospital is at least five hours away. The only alternative is the village clinic with its local health workers. The Skills-based Literacy Project for Women prepares young illiterate women to develop routine health care and first aid skills to serve their community. After «graduation» from the project, they go on to further training in the town hospital for one or two years. These women now make a decent living. They all carry on with their farmwork so as to keep up the family self-reliance on food. Their financial improvement aside, these women develop new positive attitudes of self-confidence and self-respect. «To save life is wonderful» says Zhon. She decided to move into health care when she was forced to watch helplessly as her sister died in childbirth. Other health workers have their stories to tell. One confessed that her biggest satisfaction comes from being there for the women. «Most women are too shy to talk about their health problems with male health workers but with the women they open up».

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Making it work

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Education for All, Making it Work is a major international UNESCO/UNICEF programme to collect, analyse and promote successful basic education projects in the developing world.

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All Children can Learn
Chile's 900 Schools Programme for the Underprivileged, 1993
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The opinions expressed in this document are those of the author and not necessarily those of UNESCO or UNICEF

Photo-engraving:
SG Communiktion,
France

Printed by:
Marco Gráfico, Madrid,
Spain

Making it work

Supervising editors:
Dieter Berstecher
Rosa-Maria Torres

Editor:
Benedict Faccini

Art Direction:
Jacques Zahles
Realization :
HEXA Graphic

Photographies :
Ren Hua
Namtip Aksomkool
Maia Musumeci

Calligraphy
and illustration p. 17:
Keyin

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

National Commission for UNESCO of the People's Republic of China
Mr. Due Yue, Mr. Xia Kuisun
Ms. Dong Dionghong

Yunnan Education Commission
Mr. Wang Rongxue, Mr. Yao Yong
Ms. Wang

Yunnan Normal University
Ms. Duan, Mr. Ren Hua

Ms. Heli Perrett,
UNDP, New York

and the women and girls of Xuan Wei County

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